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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses challenges to the perpetuation of American Indian languages and cultures, as well as successful strategies and practices for developing culturally relevant curriculum. A review of the history of U.S. assimilative educational policies towards American Indians leads into a discussion of the importance of language in maintaining cultural continuity and Native identity; the five stages of language preservation; and the recognition by the federal government, embodied in the Native American Languages Act of 1990, of the rights of American Indian tribes to determine their own linguistic destinies. The general population's lack of knowledge about American Indians is discussed. Seven values common to traditional Native education are identified that could form the basis of a tribal code of education or curriculum, and six recommendations are offered to move public schools toward equality and equity. An overview of successful models of culturally relevant curriculum in the U.S. and abroad is followed by a call for a National Native Curriculum Project, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, that would have regional offices develop locally researched Native curricula. The result would be a curriculum in every U.S. school that would change years of misinformation and enable students to view concepts, issues, events, and themes from the unique and diverse perspectives of Native groups. Contains references in endnotes and a bibliography. (TD)

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CHAPTER 5

Teaching through Traditions
Incorporating Languages and Culture into Curricula

LINDA SKINNER[1]

There are many challenges related to the perpetuation of American Indian languages and cultures, including the general lack of awareness within mainstream society about the presence of contemporary Indian peoples. Also, about two-thirds of the original Native languages have become extinct, along with the cultural knowledge they conveyed. Indian educators wishing to develop culturally relevant curriculum will find in this chapter descriptions of exemplary programs and successful strategies, suggestions for more effective practices, and recommendations for overall improvement of American Indian education.

Let me begin by sharing an account of my own deep immersion in these issues as both an insider and outsider.

One Teacher's Experience: A True Story

Our elders have maintained a tradition of transmitting knowledge, values, and history through oral tradition. We learn from the experiences of others. There is something beyond the story itself that

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takes hold of each listener's heart and remains in memory. As our elders have modeled their love for this method of learning and teaching, I want to give the following account of a lesson in language and culture that was for me both transforming and unforgettable. I have shared this story verbally with thousands of educators to impress the importance of developing understanding of Native languages, Native cultures, and Native children.

It was my first teaching job. I was fresh out of school, having studied at a major university in Oklahoma, preparing for what I wanted most to do in life: teach Indian children. It had been difficult to find any classes to help me do that, even in the state that had once been designated *Indian Territory* and still has more CDIB Indians (those having a Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood) than any other. The classes had very little content about culturally different children, let alone Indian children. But I had done my best. I took sociology classes, read a lot, and traveled extensively (from Greenland to Europe to Mexico). Formal teacher education study between 1966 and 1971 included one chapter on cultural diversity in one history of education textbook. That was not enough.

I was interviewed by a Zia Pueblo Day School community committee and a Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) official for a teaching position at Zia Pueblo Day School. One of their many questions was "How will you communicate with our children? They speak the Keresan language and you speak English. Of the 10 kindergarten children, most speak only Keresan." I thought a moment and answered: "I would like to learn your language, but I would also, in the beginning, communicate with the students in ways other than language." Little did I know how difficult it would be, even with the best of intentions. I quickly learned that the barriers of language and culture are big ones. Thankfully, I also learned that barriers can lead to the building of bridges. My interviewers informed me kindly that the people had important reasons for keeping the language to themselves.

I tried creative approaches during the first week of school. I depended almost completely on Mary, the Keres-speaking teacher aide, for communicating concepts. We played one game for the multiple purposes of getting comfortable with one another, having fun together, and learning both the Keresan and English names of animals. A student would imitate the sounds or movements of an

animal and the others would guess. It was great fun. Things were going very well until Mary had to leave the room. We kept playing. The kids had already imitated many of the animals around the pueblo: dogs, horses, sheep, and pigs. It was Cindy's turn. She went, "Meeoww." Immediately Alfonso jumped up and said, "Moose!" I quickly thought back to my teacher education days. I had learned about the" teachable moment," and here it was! I would teach Alfonso what a moose was. I proceeded to do just that. I put my arms way up over my head and spread my fingers wide for the antlers. I bellowed loud noises and said, "Moooose!" Their big eyes and puzzled expressions told me something was awry.

During recess (which was announced soon after this incident), I told Mary what had happened, adding that their faces told me something was not right. The look in her eyes told me she had seen similar things all too often. Her head sort of dropped in her hands as, still smiling, she uttered, "Oh, Linda, in our language, *moose* means *cat*."

We gathered the children together, and with constant bilingual translations via Mary, we sat and talked about the need to communicate. I explained that we came from different places and spoke different languages. We said we would help one another. I told them about Oklahoma, my family, and the Choctaws. They showed me a prickly pear cactus fruit and talked about hot chilies and pottery. I felt better. Serious as the predicament was, we all laughed and were genuinely amused. We all learned that day. Our classroom circle conversation was the first of many meetings on the topic of cultural relevance and authenticity in the classroom.

While driving the more than 37 miles home that night, I thought about what had happened and what I should do. I figured this sort of thing happens over and over again for the Zia people, and they deserve better for their children. I was Indian and committed to doing my best. I had chosen to be there, and yet had not succeeded that day. What had happened and what was happening to the children whose teachers did not even care about their Indian heritage? I thought about resigning so a better teacher could take over but realized that probably would not happen. I resolved to stay, do the best job I could, and pay more attention. The kids were great. They had already said they would help me, and they did. Now I was ready!

I worked every evening that week and all weekend to develop meaningful educational experiences. I listened intently to the chil-

dren. They loved horses, birds, butterflies, and fishing. Rhonda talked about "wild piggies." They knew a lot about many things like hunting, planting, seasons, dances, and pottery. They spent lots of time with their families and had close relationships with grandparents, aunties, and uncles. I developed my own instructional materials, even though the BIA had spent much money on commercially developed programs. Those prepared materials were a lot like "Dick and Jane," meant for middle-class European American kids. They were not very successful or even interesting to these curious, active Native minds.

The next Monday morning, I finally felt ready and much more secure. I set up a pretty little fishing pond with beautiful blue cardboard for water so the construction paper fish could "swim" in it. When you fished with the pole, the magnet on the end of the string would catch the fish. There were many colors because this was a bilingual color-learning game. I was proud; the kids would love it. Early that morning, Alfonso and Morris were the first students in the room. They ran over to see what was new in the corner. They kept pointing and talking to each other in Keres. I encouraged them to fish for colors, showing them how. They still seemed hesitant. They pointed to the cardboard (water) and said in a rather dissatisfied tone, "Not blue, brown." How many times had I crossed the bridge over the Rio Grande and seen the water—but not "seen" the water? It *was* brown, not blue.

This experience taught me that not only would the students be my best teachers but that the quality of their education would depend on community involvement. I began to learn, by experience and gentle Pueblo guidance, how to involve parents and community in meaningful ways, and how valuable and essential this involvement would prove to be. My young teachers lit the way for me to learn and understand.

A book called *Teacher* also helped me that year. The author, Sylvia Ashton-Warner, gave valuable insights from her experiences in recognizing and meeting the need for cultural relevance with her Maori students in New Zealand. I believe every educator and parent should read this book.

Over the past 27 years, I have shared experiences with many friends in education all over North America. This culture shock, resulting from the language-gap experience, is not unique. It hap-

pens over and over again to Native children and their teachers. We all know now, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the federal government's assimilation and indoctrination policy has not worked. It is time to meld our collective learning experiences and rise to the great challenge of creating effective classrooms that reflect respect for our children and create a stronger and more just future for all children.

Let History Speak

Cultural and linguistic genocide (ethnocide) has been directed toward Native people for many years. Of all the oppressive government policies, perhaps the most devastating have involved education. Education of Native children came under government control through a series of treaties from 1778 to 1871, and it became obvious to policy makers that education was a powerful tool for subjugating and controlling the destinies of Native peoples. The general philosophy was to "civilize" Indians. They were taken from their parents and moved to boarding schools, where they were forced to forego traditional cultural practices and embrace European American culture. For instance, at the Carlisle Indian School from 1867 to 1904, English was mandatory, long hair forbidden, and traditional Native clothing unaccepted. Captain Richard Henry Pratt captured the prevailing attitude in his memoirs: "I believe in immersing the Indians in our civilization and holding them there until they are thoroughly soaked."[2]

Many of those boarding school students are still alive, and the effects of their degradation and miseducation are carried to their children and grandchildren. Some have called this negation of self "the boarding school mentality" and presume it is responsible for the high rates of alcoholism, suicide, alienation, insecurity, and general unhappiness present in some Indian communities today.

In addition to isolation from family and suppression of cultural practices, great efforts were undertaken to eliminate Native languages and teach English. Federal policies specifically forbade the use of any Indian language for instructional purposes: "Education should seek the disintegration of the tribes. Only English should be allowed to be spoken and only English speaking teachers should be employed in schools."[3] These language policies were to be enforced

under threat of loss of government funding. Ironically, and in spite of government efforts to eradicate Native languages, there was evidence even then of effective educational practices that utilized Native languages to promote overall educational attainment.

In the 1840s the Choctaw and Cherokee had elaborate, successful schools, educating students in both Native languages and English. Not only was the Cherokee population 90 percent literate in its own language, but the English literacy level of Oklahoma Cherokees was higher than the non-Native populations in either Texas or Arkansas. There were more than 200 schools or academies, and numerous graduates went on to Eastern colleges. All of this was accomplished with complete tribal autonomy.

Then the federal government took over the schools, and Native education rapidly declined. By 1969 a U.S. Senate hearing on Indian education revealed that the median number of school years completed by the adult Cherokee was only 5.5, drop-out rates in public schools were as high as 75 percent, and the level of Cherokee education was well below the Oklahoma average and below the average for rural residents and non-Whites in the state.

In many government-controlled reservation schools, missionaries served as teachers. Though they also favored ending tribal traditions, as educators, they felt *students would ultimately learn English better if they were allowed to learn in their Native language the first three or four years.* Current research agrees with the missionaries: language-minority students who receive at least three to four years of formal schooling in their Native language generally achieve more in all subject areas, including the second language. Certainly the self-image is more intact.[4]

Addressing The Need to Reinvigorate Native Languages

Dating back at least to the 1870s, schools have made every effort to assimilate, acculturate, and indoctrinate Native students to speak the same, dress the same, wear their hair the same, and even to think and believe the same as European Americans.

The 1870 *Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners* summarizes the general attitude embodied in these educational practices, stating that education was seen as "the quickest way to civilize Indians and that education could only be given to children removed

from the examples of their parents and the influence of the camps and kept in boarding schools."[5]

According to Bea Medicine, the historic prohibitions against Native language use have had great repercussions on the communication skills of American Indians and Alaska Natives since language is the core expressive element in culture, music, song, dance, art, and religion. She also points out that the persistence of Native languages, despite the extended period of repression, attests to the great vigor of Native people and their cultures. This persistence also indicates the value placed on Native languages by parents and grandparents, who have continued in many communities to teach them to their children. These communities understand that language is critical to maintaining cultural continuity and Native identity.[6]

Michael Brunn's recent study in ethnohistory documents that speaking a heritage language is essential to identifying with traditional culture and maintaining and carrying a culture forward. He reports that "children's identities are re-formed through the process of language socialization within sociocultural contexts. Their identities are ultimately constructed through interactions within her/his affective domain." He verifies through firsthand accounts (life stories) of tribal members that "language was the key element that would carry their cultures forward and maintain their traditions. To them the loss of language meant the loss of their cultures and it gave them much concern. . . . They came to firmly believe that their heritage languages were central to their identities as culture bearers and [were] an important part of what gave them their sense of belonging; of being. . . ."[7]

To ensure that schools in the United States are ready for Native children, it is necessary for educators to realize and value the relationship between language and culture. Eli Taylor, a First Nations Elder of the Sioux Valley Reserve in Manitoba, provides a strong rationale for the revitalization of Native languages:

> Our Native language embodies a value system about how we ought to live and relate to each other. . . . It gives a name to relations among kin, to roles and responsibilities among family members, to ties with the broader clan group. . . . There are no English words for these relationships because your social and family life is different from ours. Now if you destroy this lan-

guage, you not only break down these relationships, but you also destroy other aspects of our Indian way of life and culture, especially those that describe man's connection with nature, the Great Spirit and the order of things. Without our language, we will cease to exist as a separate people.[8]

Federal policies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries succeeded in assimilating many American Indians through the education of their children. When the first of these policies became law, there were 604 Indian languages, which were, for the most part, healthy and alive.[9] Today, only 206 Indian languages remain.[10] W. L. Leap reported in 1981 that the remaining languages survive with different levels of fluency, depending on the relationship between the number of speakers and age range. Of the surviving Native languages, it is estimated that approximately 50 are on the death list. If we value diversity, and if we value languages and their connection to cultures, we must act now. There is no more time to mull over the question.

James Bauman of the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, D.C., proposes that there are five distinct stages of language preservation: flourishing, enduring, declining, obsolescent, and extinct.

Flourishing language. An example of flourishing language is Navajo, with well over 100,000 speakers, more than any other American Indian language north of Mexico. It is also the largest tribe and has the largest reservation. Most Navajo children on the reservation learn only Navajo until they begin school. Louisiana Coushatta is also a flourishing language, with a population of only 1,000 people. The most important indicators of a flourishing language can be summarized as follows:

1. It has speakers of all ages, some of them monolingual.
2. Population increases also lead to an increase in the number of speakers.
3. It is used in all communicative situations.
4. The language adapts to the changing culture of the community.
5. Speakers become increasingly more literate in their Native language.[11]

Enduring language. An example of an enduring language is Hualapai. The Hualapai and related Havasupai have fewer than 2,000 people, of whom 95 percent, including most children, speak Hualapai. The language is not expanding. An enduring language is characterized in this way:

1. It has speakers of all ages; most or all are bilingual.
2. The population of speakers tends to remain constant over time.
3. English tends to be used exclusively in some situations.
4. The language adapts to the changing culture of the community.
5. There is little or no Native language literacy in the community.[12]

Declining language. Shoshoni is a declining language. The Shoshoni Nation has approximately 7,000 members, but their language is now spoken by no more than 75 percent of the Shoshoni people, with an ominous concentration of abilities in older people. These are the characteristics of a declining language:

1. There are proportionately more older speakers than younger.
2. Younger speakers are not altogether fluent in the language.
3. The number of speakers decreases over time, even though the population may be increasing.
4. The entire population is bilingual and English is preferred in many situations.
5. The language begins to conform to and resemble English.
6. The population is essentially illiterate in the language.[13]

Obsolescent language. Pit River exemplifies an obsolescent language. More than half the Native languages still spoken north of Mexico are obsolescent. Perhaps 50 tribes have fewer than 10 speakers, all of them elderly. The language can be heard only when the elders get together. The characteristics of an obsolescent language are these:

1. An age gradient of speakers terminates in the adult population.
2. The language is not taught to children in the home.
3. The number of speakers declines very rapidly.

4. The entire population is bilingual, and English is preferred in essentially all situations.
5. The language is inflexible. It no longer adapts to new situations.
6. There is no literacy in the Native language.[14]

Extinct language. An example of an extinct language is Chumash. Approximately 32 years ago, the last speaker died, although the language had not been used for many years before.

Indian nations experiencing the various stages of language decline require different approaches to the preservation or restoration of linguistic (hence cultural) health. In the late 1980s, the first order of business for all groups, as perceived by Native American leaders and educators from across the nation, was to reverse the century-old federal policy of disintegrating tribes by exterminating their languages. These leaders approached sympathetic lawmakers, who eventually passed the *Native American Languages Act* (NALA) of 1990. This law explicitly establishes as policy the government's responsibility to assist Native American tribes to preserve, protect, and promote the rights of Native Americans to use, practice, and develop Native American languages.

While testifying in behalf of this act, Senator Daniel Inouye explained the impact of loss of language on a group:

> Traditional languages are an integral part of Native American cultures, heritages, and identities. History, religion, literature, and traditional values are all transmitted through language. When a language is lost, the ability to express concepts in a certain way is also lost. For example, names for objects or events in nature reflect the way people understand those phenomena. When they no longer know the name of something in their own language, they no longer have the same relationship with it, and part of their culture dies along with this communication loss.[15]

When President Bush signed this bill into Public Law 101-477, he not only changed the old policy but added further responsibility to empower states and local education agencies, tribal governments, and communities to determine their own linguistic destinies (see box).

Native American Languages Act
Public Law 101-477 §2903. Declaration of Policy.

It is the policy of the United States to

1) preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use, practice, and develop Native American languages;

2) allow exceptions to teacher certification requirements for Federal programs, and programs funded in whole or in part by the Federal Government, for instruction in Native American languages when such teacher certification requirements hinder the employment of qualified teachers who teach in Native American languages, and to encourage State and territorial governments to make similar exceptions;

3) encourage and support the use of Native American languages as a medium of instruction in order to encourage and support Native American language survival, educational opportunity,

A) increased student success and performance,

B) increased student awareness and knowledge of their culture and history, and

C) increased student and community pride;

4) encourage State and local education programs to work with Native American parents, educators, Indian tribes, and other Native American governing bodies in the implementation of programs to put this policy into effect;

5) recognize the right of Indian tribes and other Native American governing bodies to use the Native American languages as a medium of instruction in all schools funded by the Secretary of the Interior;

6) fully recognize the inherent right of Indian tribes and other Native American governing bodies, States, territories, and possessions of the United States to take action on, and give official status to, their Native American languages for the purpose of conducting their own business;

7) support the granting of comparable proficiency achieved through course work in a Native American language the same academic credit as comparable proficiency achieved through course work in a foreign language, with recognition of such Native American language proficiency by institutions of higher education as fulfilling foreign language entrance or degree requirements;

8) encourage all institutions of elementary, secondary and higher education, where appropriate, to include Native American languages in the curriculum in the same manner as foreign languages and to grant proficiency in Native American languages the same full academic credit as proficiency in foreign languages.

Passage of this bill was an important turning point in the federal government's treatment of First Americans. However, a change in policy cannot magically undo past wrongs and present-day effects. It also does not automatically change current practices that continue to miseducate Native children in public schools. Nor does it change misperceptions by non-Native students about Native people, their languages, and their cultures. Irene Silentman, who works in language planning, says

> To become more than a federal-level "gesture," NALA requires active support by tribes and Indian communities. With comprehensive support for many *tribal*-level education and language policies still lacking, it is unclear how national-level laws like the NALA will have an impact.[16]

Dr. Dick Littlebear, in his work to preserve Native languages, writes

> The topic of language death has been "dialogued" to death. Those who are serious about preserving their languages must act now. They have to start tape-recording and video-taping their elders, to begin developing curriculum for language development and content area instruction, and begin comprehensive, college-credit training programs. Whatever action is taken, it must emanate from the Native American cultures whose language is to be preserved. . . . It is up to Native Americans to preserve their languages and cultures. To help reinforce what the schools are trying to do, Native Americans should just talk their languages everywhere, with everyone all the time.[17]

Addressing Lack of Knowledge about American Indians

As we enter the twenty-first century, many barriers stand in the way of equity for Indian students. The failure of national policy and the prevalence of stereotypical attitudes about American Indians continue to undermine effective, equitable education. More than 20 years ago, the American Indian Policy Review Commission reached this conclusion:

> One of the greatest obstacles faced by the Indian today in his drive for self-determination and a place in this nation is the American public's ignorance of the historical relationship of the United States with Indian tribes and the lack of general awareness [of] the status of the American Indian in our society today.[18]

American Indians and Alaska Natives have a unique government-to-government relationship between individual sovereign Native nations and the U.S. government. There is no other minority or ethnic group with this status. Education is an entitlement granted through treaties for American Indians and Alaska Natives, not a handout. Understanding this unique relationship is the first step in grasping the complex nature of Native education today. Education, often thought of as a privilege, is actually a right, based on federal trust responsibility. Several laws, already on the books, mandate multilingual and multicultural Native education, but they have not been implemented.

One persistent problem Native leaders and educators must overcome is their *invisibility* to non-Natives in the larger society. John Tippeconnic III explains that because American Indians comprise less than one percent of the U.S. population,

> They are truly a minority among minorities. This fact has political, economic, and social consequences when money is allocated or programs developed; or when data is collected for minority groups. Often American Indians are forgotten because of their small numbers or grouped under "other" when data is collected and analyzed. At times it appears that American Indians are just low in priority when compared to other ethnic or special interest groups.[19]

American Indians and Alaska Natives are often considered vanishing races, museum relics. In the National Museum of Natural History, a division of the Smithsonian Institution, a teacher was asked by one of her schoolchildren, "Where are the Indians now?" She was overheard to have replied, "Oh, I don't think there are Indians anymore."[20]

Conditions of ethnocentrism and ignorance of Native cultures pervade American school systems, compounded by the lack of Na-

tive educators, which together create specific educational problems. Native values are traditionally handed down by elders. But these eminent persons, who hold the knowledge that can keep our cultures and languages intact, are missing from classrooms. While schools have ways to certify Spanish, French, and German teachers (*foreign* languages), they do not provide alternative certification for *Native* languages. These languages are national treasures, and the survival of our people depends upon their preservation.

This neglect of Native values robs Native students of their cultural pride and personal identities, impedes their success, and makes them feel inferior and insecure. Moreover, Native students tend to be confused by curricular content and design that are not culturally relevant, authentic, or tribal specific, and that harbor cultural bias and stereotypes. Not only do most textbooks and history classes teach Eurocentric versions of American history,[21] but there is a lack of effective action on a national level to change the way teachers are educated to respond to the culturally different child. Many classroom-based language development activities uncouple language and culture, depriving students of the opportunity to use language and culture in real communication.[22] Schools have failed also to create opportunities for American Indian and Alaska Native students to access leadership positions within student bodies and communities.

Natives themselves share some of the blame. Native governments and communities have failed to accept responsibility for determining the future of their people in all areas, including education, and continue to perceive themselves as victims.

In a recent report on Native American colleges, Paul Boyer states, "So while we describe the educational needs of Indians in this report, we believe Indian education should come to mean not just the education of Indians, but also education about Indians."[23] Marjane Ambler, editor of the *Tribal College Journal*, reports this problem eloquently and writes about the impact of America's ignorance on the lives of Indians:

> I have yet to meet anyone who was taught about treaties or tribal sovereignty in a high school civics class when they learned about federal, state, and local governments. When conflicts arise it is not a time for education. As states and tribes battle over taxation, water rights, or gaming compacts, citizens tend

> to be polarized, not informed by the debate. We therefore conclude our study with the hope that Native Americans will be given a stronger place in the curriculum of America's schools. The goal should be more than increased 'sensitivity' or awareness of 'diversity.'[24]

Boyer's report proposes that all students leave high school having learned three "pieces of essential knowledge": understanding the richness of Native American heritage, that Indians are contemporary people, and that Indians hold a unique place in the nation's body of law.[25]

Developing Curricula and Practices Relevant to Each Community

As described earlier, tribal languages and cultures represent great diversity, and Native languages exist in varying stages of linguistic vitality. This situation calls for flexible, locally appropriate approaches, which vary from community to community. Yet, we all want the best educational experiences for our most precious treasures, our children.

It is also more evident than ever before that our Native population has a brilliant pool of educators, parents, elders, tribal leaders, students, and families, who today eloquently express their hearts and minds. This is no accident. Through adversity, we have had to develop strength and endurance. Our recent history has been filled with conflict, suffering, losses, and factionalism. Yet, our hearts remain full of the ancient values of respect, generosity, and love for our children, elders, and all of life's circle. Our minds keep the remembrance of oral tradition, the histories of our ancestors, the images of our grandparents, and even the memories of their memories. We are spiritually connected to our past, our present, and our future.

Those of us who serve as educators have had the *opportunity* for many years to deal with education reform on the local grassroots level, as well as state and national levels. We have learned needs assessment, curriculum design and development, implementation, and evaluation, all within the context of community and tribal cul-

tures. It is time to come full circle and put forth the best we have to give for our future, our children.

Traditionally education among Native people helped children find meaning in life. The curriculum was balanced, attending to cognitive learning (factual information necessary for survival) and relating it to affective and emotional learning through oral tradition and knowledge guided by tribal elders. Children developed physical strength and skills through games and daily activities. They developed social skills through group experiences, grounded in the philosophy that we are born into lives of service. We do not exist alone. Community is important. All these lessons are connected to spirituality, which is at the center of our existence.

Amidst our cultural and linguistic diversities, we share guiding values that could form the base of a tribal code of education or could become curricular content, learned through interdisciplinary activities. These shared values include

- generosity and cooperation
- independence and freedom
- respect for elders and wisdom
- connectedness and love
- courage and responsibility
- indirect communication and noninterference
- silence, reflection, and spirit

These values were once taught by communities; they can be again today. When communities produce education, values and beliefs are expressed, languages are spoken, songs are sung, and histories are heard. The people determine their priorities and develop a loving, collective ownership of the curriculum.

Every district must have a curriculum relevant to its community that also uses multicultural approaches and methods to value diversity and teach tolerance. Every district must be responsible for using the rich resources it has at hand. This does not mean holding one or two meetings where one Joe and one Jane show up and then conclude that parents do not care. Historically, schools have alienated American Indian parents. This negative cycle must be broken. The

small number of local education agencies (LEAs) that have made good progress in establishing positive communication with parents must be nationally recognized. They should be awarded the opportunity to share their secrets of success with all, raising the standards and expectations of respectful relationships.

Textbook companies must realize their obligation to represent all people with truth in print. Textbook commissions can assist each state in solving the problem of institutionalized racism by refusing to buy books that denigrate any group or perpetuate any stereotypes, or that include cultural bias or insufficient information about particular groups.

The following recommendations would move our public schools toward equality and equity:

- Every local school board should have representation of each minority in its district, elected by that minority.
- The proportion of teachers from various racial/ethnic groups should match the proportions present in the student population served in each individual LEA.
- Every LEA must recognize the relationship of language to culture and establish programs that use the languages and emphasize their importance.
- Teachers must be trained and retrained to meet the education needs of all minority children. Where qualified teachers are in short supply, programs must be implemented to allow for special certification to meet student needs until teachers can be trained. Teachers who prove unable or unwilling, over time, to address the education needs of *all* students should be removed from school faculties.
- Districts that receive federal funding for Native students must be forced to include Native parents from local communities on committees that establish policies. The ratio of parents on these committees should reflect the number of children in the district as well as the amount of money the endorsement of those children generates. Native communities must be involved wherever local education agency (LEA) expenditures include federal monies.

- The federal government must take the initiative and enforce current legislation.

Without such changes, we can expect the continuation of the same unhealthy situations that have led many Native communities to crisis.

Successful Models of Culturally Relevant Curriculum

How can we define the path of learning we want to create for our students? An obvious way to begin is by examining positive aspects of the past and applying them to the future. For instance, the ancient wisdom that *all things are interrelated* can be exemplified in a contemporary interdisciplinary curriculum. Tribal elders can help by discussing traditional learning and how science, language, mathematics, the arts, social studies, music, and physical education can be taught together, using culture as the common denominator and motivational vehicle. The Wa He Lute Indian School at Frank's Landing, Washington, is an excellent example. Educators and community members developed a seasonal-environmental curriculum based on traditional values, oral traditions, and guidance from elders. Their curricular experiences were based on the Nisqually River, Mount Rainier, and the local flora and fauna (huckleberries, salmon berries, alder, cedar, and fish).[26] Project Preserve in Bemidji, Minnesota, has honored the past by compiling a book of memories and photographs of elders on the reservation, serves the present with a strong volunteer program, and prepares for the future by helping young people succeed in college classes. The book and volunteer program reflect crucial characteristics of Indian education such as Native culture and cultural skills, allowing for collaborative efforts and individual talent, using the teacher as a facilitator, deriving knowledge from experience rather than textbooks, making participation voluntary, and including multigenerational characteristics.

Most importantly community members need to take active roles. Discuss common stereotypes and cultural biases to which your children have been exposed, and examine textbooks for untruthful representations and biased accounts of historical events. Become advocates for your students by serving on textbook commissions and

school boards and by working to recruit more Native teachers and administrators.

Other countries also provide effective models. New Zealand, for example, has designed culturally relevant practices that not only preserve, promote, and protect languages but also elevate respect for Native languages. There, schools work to reflect various cultural groups in classroom and extracurricular activities. Students are always encouraged to use their first languages. Welcome signs in and around schools and greetings in school newsletters are offered in various languages, reflecting the different cultures represented by the students. Books are available in a variety of languages, and tutors are familiar with students' first languages. Second language learners are invited to use their first language during assemblies and other official functions, and people from ethnic minority communities act as resource people, speaking to students in both formal and informal settings.

Tribal colleges have a role to play in developing successful models of language instruction and culturally relevant curricula. Carnegie reports from 1989 and 1997 recommended that tribal colleges continue to expand their important role in preserving the languages, history, arts, philosophy, science, and religious studies of their tribes: "The study and preservation of traditional culture is a vital part of every tribal college's mission. All teach tribal languages, and most offer classes in the history and traditions of their tribe."[27]

Exemplary programs. Exemplary Native education programs are as varied as the people they represent, and that is part of the key to their successes. Each program has grown out of expressed needs and thoughtful visions of their children's futures. In the United States today, there are exemplary programs for rural, urban, public, alternative, and tribally controlled schools. Some of these programs are briefly described in the following paragraphs.

The Hualapai Bilingual Academic Excellence Program in Peach Springs, Arizona, provides a firm foundation for the development of a curriculum based on the linguistic and cultural background of the community and its children. The program philosophy and learning theory base are congruent with community beliefs and values. The Hualapai Cultural Environmental Curriculum is a thematic approach. The theme formulates the content of the units and is based on topics

with a special relevance to the local Native community. Science, mathematics, and language arts studies relate to the environment and life experiences of the Hualapai reservation. Discovery and experience are integral to the curriculum.[28]

At Isleta Pueblo, a computer program developed by a University of New Mexico professor, Ted Jojola (an Isleta Native), assists Head Start students in learning the language and folkways of their ancient tribe. Opinion differs on whether to continue this project. The children are learning but so too are non-Isletans. Some fear sharing tribal knowledge with the offspring of people who have tried during the last 500 years to destroy Native cultures in one way or another.

In 1990 Verna Graves, director of education, Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians, stated the tribal government of the Red Lake Band was the only tribe in the Western Hemisphere that had prepared a comprehensive code for education.[29] The band developed seven education goals and four general education objectives. The tribal council declared the Chippewa language the official language of Red Lake. The education goals encompass a broad knowledge of Chippewa culture and are integrated into all phases of the curriculum.

Graves quoted the *Augustus F. Hawkins-Robert T. Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments* (1988), which guarantee that the assistant secretary of the Department of Interior

> shall provide for comprehensive multicultural and multilingual education programs including the production and use of instructional materials, culturally appropriate methodologies and teaching and learning strategies that will reinforce, preserve and maintain Indian and Alaska Native languages, cultures and histories.[30]

Though these policies were written for federally recognized Indian nations, Graves anticipated that policies written by Indian people would be adopted by other school systems enrolling American Indian students. She eloquently stated a common theme when she testified:

> We believe it is necessary and inherently proper for each tribe to develop systems of education. For years we have danced to

> the tune of others as education plans were written for us; we will now go forward with our own plans to serve our own people governed and prescribed from within to serve the individual member and our tribe as a whole.[31]

The language policy of the Red Lake Band Education Code is an excellent example of tribal autonomy in education. The policy begins, "The Chippewa language is a gift from the Creator to our people and, therefore, shall be treated with respect."[32] The Code includes these 15 sections:

1. reciprocity of language use
2. protection of language use authority
3. general application
4. status of the Chippewa language
5. parent involvement
6. eminent persons/elders
7. Chippewa language as an integral part of all school curricula
8. orthography
9. teacher, administrator, and guidance counselor competencies for language instruction (preservice and in-service)
10. teachers and teacher aides (certification for language instruction)
11. establishment of the Red Lake Language and Culture Commission
12. composition of the Red Lake Language and Culture Commission
13. role and function of the Red Lake Language and Culture Commission
14. research and external studies that require tribal approval
15. funding for language policy implementation

The Indian Reading Series, published by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, is an example of a curriculum created by Indian authors and authenticated by the participating tribes. It was

field-tested in more than 93 classrooms. The student books show the cultural diversity of Indian America and are designed to improve reading comprehension, classroom participation, and written and oral language skills. The teacher manuals relate cultural background information, program objectives and rationale, and teaching activities to Native culture, utilizing the language experience approach to learning. The activities are designed to help students learn *how* to think, rather than *what* to think.

The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction began offering three teacher training programs and a four-part Native curriculum built around the North Dakota Centennial celebration after a survey showed that 99 percent of North Dakota teachers did not have books about Native Americans in their classrooms. Other findings of the survey showed 75 percent of the teachers did not frequently plan activities reflective of cultural diversity, while 91 percent did not plan activities reflecting Native culture.[33]

A school in Pawnee, Oklahoma, has found a unique solution to a political, social, and legal dilemma. Helen Norris's Indian students visited Pawnee homelands in Republic, Nebraska, and toured the original earth lodges of their ancestors. In 1985, 42 students and their parents traveled to the Field Museum in Chicago to visit the largest display of Pawnee artifacts in the United States. In 1988 students wrote to the Nebraska Historical Society, asking the society to release 378 skeletal remains of their ancestors and burial goods that had been dug up. Their letters became part of a congressional hearing report and were instrumental in the reburial of 146 Pawnee, Arikara, and Wichita ancestors who had been put on public display in Salina, Kansas. The students also raised money for a Pendleton blanket to be placed on one of the bodies for burial. This labor of love encompassed cultural and linguistic tradition, writing, speaking, listening, researching, and communicating with elders, staff, attorneys, legislators, and one another.[34]

United National Indian Tribal Youth (UNITY), an Oklahoma-based national organization, is involved in activities that enable Native youth to meet together, define problems, identify solutions, and develop strategies to address their concerns. The goals and strategies are built around spirituality, unity, environment, heritage, sovereignty, family, individual, education, health, economy, sobriety, and service.

The Cheyenne Circle Keepers consists of children in four western Oklahoma communities who have pledged to keep their bodies, minds, and spirits strong—in holding with ancient tradition. They have special interactions with their Native elders, learning the history and traditions that keep a people strong. Their gourd dance clan is a powerful presence, showing what love for children and elders can produce.

The value of embracing our cultural roots is echoed by Paul Boyer:

> If we have learned anything from our relationship with the American Indian, it is that people cannot be torn from their cultural roots without harm. To the extent that we fail to assist Native Americans through their own institutions, to reclaim their past and secure their future, we are compounding the costly errors of the past.[35]

A Call for a National Native Curriculum Project

To meet the education needs of Native students, it is essential that we establish a National Native Curriculum Project, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, as an entitlement based on treaty rights. The need is clear, not only for Native students but for all students, to create more accurate learning experiences related to American Indians and Alaska Natives.

This National Native Curriculum Project should have a central office, director, and staff of Native curriculum developers with years of experience in Native communities and education. Regional offices should be established in each of the identified cultural areas to develop locally researched Native curricula that accurately reflect the lifeways of the people. The results would necessarily be tribal-specific, nonstereotypical, authentic, and free of cultural bias. All regional centers would feed into the national center (and vice versa). The result would be a curriculum of empowerment for students, enhanced by the generous contributions of all Native groups for all Native children. This curriculum, accompanied by accurate resource materials, would be placed in every school in the United States to bring children honor and to ensure that future generations may benefit from this decisive action.

In this way, we can change years of misinformation to achieve a future that goes beyond the "Thanksgiving and Indians" syndrome. The contributions of Native peoples would be discussed, along with heroes and holidays, resulting in a higher level of learning. The structure of the curriculum itself would be transformed to enable students to view concepts, issues, events, and themes from the unique and diverse perspectives of Native groups. Then, and only then, will students gain the necessary level of critical thinking to make thoughtful decisions on issues and proactive personal choices.

In conclusion, we must join together now to make a good life for our children and our children's children seven generations to come. Creating caring classroom communities that nurture the human spirit, regardless of ethnicity, is the beginning step in building an educational environment that does not assault any student's culture.

Together, we can move from the inaccurate and trivial to the meaningful essence of who we all are. We can work together to create acceptance and understanding that will naturally carry us to real relationships with one another. We can foster authentic interaction based on respect and trust, which will lead to the education of children who have powerful voices for peaceful relations with others. Now *there* is a curriculum with meaning for all of us. Our children can grow up respected and respectful, having the inner resources and strength to act with love, wisdom, reason, and responsibility. They can build their world with the power of love and acceptance.

We are responsible for what we teach and how we teach. Rethinking our approach to a curriculum for diversity will send a message. We value one another. We believe we can create unity in all our diversity. We believe our children have the critical thinking skills to examine our collective histories, not just memorize dates and facts, but to comprehend meaning, practice application, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate critically. We can trust our children. Can they trust us? In America at the close of the twentieth century, democratic values of tolerance, acceptance, respect, responsibility, and justice remain the cornerstones of our way of life. Can we rekindle our passion for "liberty and justice for all" and purposefully create a life that reflects what we value?

Be models of liberty. Be models of justice. Embrace our diversity, for it truly is our greatest strength.

Notes

1. Linda Skinner (Choctaw) teaches in Edmond, Oklahoma, Public Schools.

2. See Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom.*

3. House Executive Document, 93-97.

4. In *Bilingual and ESL Classrooms,* Ovando and Collier observe the following: "Many studies have shown that cognitive and academic development in L1 has a strong, positive effect of L2 development for academic purposes. . . . Academic skills, literacy development, concept formation, subject knowledge, and learning strategies all transfer from L1 and L2 as the vocabulary and communicative patterns are developed in L2 to express that academic knowledge. [Jim] Cummins . . . refers to this phenomenon as 'common underlying proficiency' or the 'interdependence' of languages. Cummins' view is supported by research in linquistic universals, which has found many properties common across all languages at deep underlying structural levels. . . . Only in surface structures do languages appear to be radically different. But still deeper than language itself is the underlying knowledge base and life experience that students have development in L1, all of which is available to them once they have the ability to express that knowledge in L2."

5. See U.S. Board of Indian Commissioners, 1870 *Annual Report.*

6. Medicine, *Speaking Indian,* 3.

7. Brunn, *Ethnohistories,* 12.

8. See Jamieson, *The Aboriginal Language Policy Study.*

9. McGee, *Bureau of Ethnology Report,* 11.

10. See Reeves, "The High Cost of Endurance."

11. Bauman, *A Guide to Issues in Indian Language Retention,* 7.

12. Ibid., 9.

13. Ibid., 10.

14. Ibid., 11.

15. See Inouye, Congressional Record, Senate.

16. Silentman, *Revaluing Indigenous Language Resources.*

17. See Littlebear, "A Model."

18. See American Indian Policy Review Commission, *Report on Indian Education.*

19. Tippeconnic, *American Indians,* 256.

20. Kaupp, personal correspondence, November 1990.

21. Textbooks perpetuate inaccuracies and myths about Indians. Non-Native authors write most textbooks and trade books. Most are filled with

propaganda from mainstream society's perspective including untruths, half-truths, obvious omissions, and terminology laden with cultural bias. Virtually no mandated local, state, or federal classes in the United States offer an accurate history of Natives in America (prehistory, transition, contemporary, and implications for the future).

22. Often, memorization of verbal labels is confused with the infinite creativity of speaking a language.

23. See Boyer, *Native American Colleges.*

24. Ibid., 98.

25. Ibid.

26. See Skinner, *Teaching Through Traditions.*

27. See Boyer, *Native American Colleges.*

28. See Watahomigie's testimony, Indian Nations At Risk (INAR) Task Force, *Indian Nations At Risk.*

29. See Graves's testimony, INAR Task Force, *Indian Nations At Risk.*

30. Public Law 100-297, Section 5106.

31. See Graves's testimony, INAR Task Force, *Indian Nations At Risk.*

32. Ibid.

33. See Kulas's testimony, INAR Task Force, *Indian Nations At Risk.*

34. See Norris's testimony, INAR Task Force, *Indian Nations At Risk.*

35. See Boyer, *Native American Colleges.*

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